"The Power of Healing Through Art"

presented by Cynthia East,LMSW, Ellen Green,MSW and Craig Washington,MSW

Writing a "Who I am" poem

Overview:

This activity begins active introspective process while continuing to provide opportunities for individuals to make connections with themselves and others. Participants write short poems, starting each line with "I am," encouraging them to describe in their own words who they are and what's salient to their identity.

Objectives:

In any attempt to increase awareness and encourage self-development, it is crucial to engage participants in activities which call for introspection and self-reflection. It is also important to provide opportunities for participants to make connections across, and even within, cultural lines. The "Who I Am" activity can provide a non-threatening starting point for encouraging self-reflective thought and introspection. It is a safe way for people to think about and share the influences that have shaped their identities. Also, it continues the connection-making process as participants find unexpected similarities and differences between themselves and others in the group.

This activity can be an excellent LAST activity, allowing folks to re-connect at a self-defined and human level at the end of an experience in which they are discussing difficult issues.

Instructions:

Ask participants to take ten to fifteen minutes to write a poem called "Who I Am." Instruct them that the only rule for the piece is that each line must start with the phrase "I am..." Leave it open to their interpretation as much as possible, but suggest that they can, if they wish, include statements about where they're from regionally, ethnically, spiritually etc., memories from different points in their lives, interests and hobbies, mottos or credos, favorite phrases, family traditions and customs, and whatever else defines who they are. Be sure to let them know that they will be asked to share their poems.

Facilitator Notes:

In order to ensure that everybody has an opportunity to share her or his story, you might consider breaking the group into diverse small groups of 8-10 if necessary. Give

participants the option to either read their poems share parts of their poems from memory, or share what came up from them in the process.

Points to remember:

1. Because some individuals will include very personal information, some may be hesitant to read their poems, even in small groups. It is sometimes effective in such situations for facilitators to share their poems first. Consider sharing your poem before asking participants to write their own pieces. If you make yourself vulnerable, others will be more comfortable doing the same.
2. Be sure to allow time for everyone to be able to speak, whether reading their poems or sharing them from memory.
3. If you're using this as a final activity, not much processing is necessary. Encourage applause, and thank folks for sharing their poetry.
4. If you use this activity in the middle of a session or workshop, have some process questions ready. For example after everyone has shared that wishes to, ask participants how it felt to share their poems.
5. Ask what, if any, connections people made with each other from this activity. What were some commonalities across poems? Did any of these surprise you?
6. You might also consider asking people to get up and talk to someone who you felt a connection with through the poetry.

Sample - My Personal *"Who I Am" Poem:*

I am early morning work outs with latte rewards
I am silly and chronically serious
I am mediation with a monkey mind
I am well loved and loving
I am a white privileged woman
I am roller skating across the smooth surface of the carport
I am teachable
I am yarn, colors, and connections
I am green bean with pumpkin seeds on Thanksgiving day
I am southern, sassy, and sentimental
I am hiking to new heights and exploring the depth
I am sister, partner, mother, daughter, friend
I am enthusiasm
I am curiosity, ever evolving
I am NPR, even during fund drives, democracy now and "the office"
I am compassionate self scrutiny
I am thirsty for justice and beauty

Adapted from www.EdChange.org

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